

[p. 12 b]

136 to the fauna is equally unsatisfactory. Despite
the extensive forests, wild life is scarce. No
136 one in Cherán gets a living from hunting, and
224 the amount of game taken forms an in-
considerable amount of the food supply. Deer and
peccary are sometimes hunted and occasionally
damage outlying fields, but they do not seem to
be numerous. Squirrels, rabbits, wild pigeons,
and quail are among the animals of most
economic importance. Badgers are known, but
are not eaten. An exception to the general
scarcity of wild life is the coyote. This animal
appears to be numerous and to be a danger to
livestock in the outskirts of the town. Larger
predatory animals, such as the jaguar and the
mountain lion, are unknown. Informants
could recall only one mountain lion being seen
or killed in the vicinity of the town. The re-
gion is, of course, too high for the absence of
the jaguar to be surprising, but smaller mem-
bers of the genus *Felis* are also rare. Only the
wildcat is reported. The rattlesnake and
culebrilla occur, but are not common. As there
are few handicrafts practiced in Cherán, the
community is consequently primarily agricul-
[311] tural and the only use of the forests is for
lumbering, charcoal making, and grazing.

142 Little need be said about the people of Cherán
or their language. Although white admixture
certainly exists in the town's population, there
[144] are virtually no acknowledged Mestizos. Until
studies of the Tarascan population are com-
pleted, it perhaps will suffice to say that the
people of Cherán seem to be typical Tarascans,
on the average relatively short and slender,
although stocky individuals are not uncommon.
Their complexion is relatively dark, the hair is
straight, and the features are attractive. Cor-
pulence in old age is very rare. Goiter or
164 incipient goiter is common, especially in the
147 mountain towns, although the disease is less
frequent in Cherán than in many other settle-
ments. Teeth are bad, a condition observed
for the area in pre-Columbian remains also.
Not only are caries frequent, but malocclusion
is common. Individuals with attractive regu-
lar teeth are the exception. (Pls. 1, upper and
lower right; 2; 3, center and lower right and
left.)

197 The language of Cherán is Tarascan, a tongue
which shows relatively few dialectic differences.

[p. 13a]

- 197 Probably no group of Tarascans has great difficulty in understanding any other group. As Tarascan has not been subjected to intensive grammatical analysis, thus far no affiliations for the language have been seriously proposed.

- 105 To summarize the discussion, the Tarascans appear to be fairly typical of the plateau Indians of Central Mexico in type, but they speak a unique language. Both anciently and today

[text continues on top of p. 13b]

TECHNOLOGY

EXPLOITATIVE ACTIVITIES

- 128 In this section are described the techniques of the Cherán Tarascans for the exploitation of the environment. With a few exceptions, manufacturing processes, the uses to which the products are put, and the economic system into which they enter are discussed in later sections.

COLLECTING

- 222 *Plants.*—No food plants are collected regularly. Recourse is sometimes had to edible greens in times of starvation or as an occasional means of bringing variety into the diet. Most useful plants, except medicinal herbs, exist in the town in virtually a semidomesticated state. This is particularly true of the [263] most commonly used plants such as *kulántro* (*silantro*),² the most frequently employed herb for flavoring food. Similarly, *manzanillo*, [278] probably the most generally used medicinal herb, is to be found in every garden. Discussion of these plants can therefore best be deferred to the discussions of medicine and the house gardens.

- A small wild maguey growing in the mountains and in the *malpais* (lava flows) is collected from November to May. The heart is roasted in pit ovens and sold.

- [252] One minor commercial enterprise, formerly of some importance, is collecting *raiz de paja*, 412 the roots of a coarse grass. The roots are cut off and carried to Cherán, where they are carefully laid out in rows on sunny, dry days. After drying, they are tied in bundles for sale

- [104] ²Tarascan words are in Roman and Spanish words are in Italic unless they are in frequent English usage. Spanish words with special local meanings are in quotation marks.

[text continues on middle of p. 13b]

535 her and perform a special dance. The circle, the reverential respect, and the dance are repeated until the participants grow weary.

[796]
[103]
[131] The Dance of the Viejitos is performed chiefly during the religious fiestas of December, especially in the town of Pátzcuaro, a short distance from the old imperial village of Tzintzuntzan (Fig. 1).

JUST AS THE BIRDS

Historical Comment

175 With their capital at Tzintzuntzan (Place of the Hummingbird),
642 the vast Tarascan empire extended beyond the boundaries of the
131 modern state of Michoacán and, next to the Aztec empire, was the
largest political unit in Mexico. In spite of several accounts by
early Spanish friars (Basalenque, 1886; Beaumont, 1932; Escobar,
1924; Mendieta, 1870; Rea, 1882), perhaps less is known about the
origin and historical antecedents of the Tarascans than of any
other major Mexican group.

17 Traditional Mexican hypotheses derive them from the north-
west, suggesting close affinity to Nahuatl peoples. Philologically,
[197] this theory does not hold up; the Tarascan language has no family
connection with other Mexican idioms and must be classified as
an independent, isolated family (Mason, 1940). Recent archaeological
work (Brand, 1944, Goggin, 1943, p. 57; Osborne, 1943) indicates
a more southeasterly origin, possibly from the Mixteca of
Oaxaca and Guerrero either down the east arm of the Balsas River
valley or along the Pacific Coast and thence northward up the
Balsas, Tepalcatepec, and Marqués rivers into central Michoacán
(Fig. 2).

173 The Tarascans have never indulged in scholarly hypotheses.
829 For them the answer to their early origins and travels unfolds in
[814] the legend of the birds. This legend supports the theory of a
southern origin.